

Difference between in hand and at hand

These expressions are often confused.

When you have something in your hand, you are holding it.

Have you got anything in your hand?

You are hiding something in your hand, aren't you?

The expressions 'at hand' and 'in hand' have literal meanings.

To have something **at hand** is to have it conveniently near you.

I always keep a dictionary **at hand**.

When you are working in the kitchen, you must have a fire extinguisher **at hand**.

When you have small children in the house, you must have a first aid box **at hand**.

The expression 'to hand' has a very similar meaning.

'Do you remember how many books we sold last week?' 'I'm afraid, I don't have that information **to hand**.' (OR ... I don't have that information at hand.)

In hand

The phrase 'in hand' has several uses. To have something in your hand is to have an extra amount of something. This expression is commonly used to talk about time.

I will have no difficulty finishing this project before the deadline as I still have three weeks in hand.

A problem / situation in hand is a problem / situation that you are dealing with at the moment.

I have got quite a few problems in hand.

I have got several offers in hand.

To **take the situation in hand** is to control it.

The police couldn't take the situation in hand.

If **something is in hand**, it is immediately available.

We have got thousands of applications in hand.

If something goes **out of hand**, it becomes uncontrollable.

Unemployment has gotten out of hand.

On / upon your hands

When you have something **on/upon your hands**, you have it in possession as an added responsibility.

They have four babies and six dogs on their hands.

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